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OUR ART CLUBS.

II.—THE AMERICAN WATER COLOR SOCIETY.

THE question is often asked, how did the Water Color Society come into existence? The answer is, "It grew." In the Exhibition of the Artists' Fund Society in 1866 was a large collection of Water Colors, the best and most important that had up to that time ever been shown in America. Many were of large size and by English artists of note. Mr. John F. Kensett, president of the society, thus alludes to it in the Seventh Annual Report: "To the efforts of your special committee, Messrs. John M. Falconer, Charles Parsons and Alfred Jones, the lovers of Art are indebted for the most rare and beautiful collection of water color drawings ever placed before the public in this city, marking an era in that department which the Board hopes to see repeated annually."

As the Annual Oil Exhibits had been dragging slowly, Mr. Falconer had proposed the water color movement, and his committee had great success in securing pictures. Many were hung in the corridor of

of which ninety-six were by members. The quantity of works was decreasing, but the quality was advancing. The fifth exhibition opened on January 26th, 1872, with 341 works, of which ninety-three were by members. All of these five exhibitions had been held in connection with the Oil Exhibition of the Academy, and were of no pecuniary benefit to the Society. The Academy was, moreover, generally closed in the evening. The Academicians, as a body, did not apparently regard water color painting seriously, and gave it no encouragement. The Management of the Academy seemed to consider that water color pictures did not attract any visitors to the exhibition, and discouraged the Society.

One peculiar feature of these exhibitions was the distribution, by the

secretary, the late Gilbert Burling, of a little book entitled "Water Color Painting: Some Facts and Authorities in relation to its Durability." This book was widely circulated. People seemed to think water color a very perishable thing, and feared that the pictures would soon fade, and leave only the bare paper; and this pamphlet was intended to controvert that idea. It had its influence, undoubtedly; for at the fifth exhibition, twenty-eight works were sold. This was considered a wonderful success, and the treasurer urged upon members "the duty and benefit of working faithfully the coming season."

A new difficulty now presented itself, viz.: the Academy had concluded not to hold another Fall exhibition, as the artists and the public had not shown sufficient interest in it to make it profitable. It was important that the Society should continue, and to do so it must exhibit. So with a very light heart and a still lighter treasury it boldly hired the Academy, and set out to hold the Sixth Annual Exhibition on its own responsibility. It was opened on February 6th, 1873, with 254 water colors, and 100 drawings in black and white. The walls were decorated, and the stairway covered with flowering plants. This was regarded as an innovation by the Academy. Mr. Edwd. Brown was engaged as salesman, and the exhibition was a splen-



ALFRED FREDERICKS.

the Academy, which was then a much dreaded place. Some of the frames were of such a strange pattern that it was difficult to hang them; and A. W. Warren, who was serving on the Hanging Committee, wanted to saw off the projecting ends of such as offered the most uncompromising resistance to the ingenuity of the committee. One of the pictures so badly framed was "Dead Game," by Gilbert Burling, who was much annoyed by being placed in the corridor, and he set out to start a Water Color Society, with Sam. Colman and others, Mr. J. M. Falconer giving his assistance.

They moved rapidly, for on the 5th of December, 1866, the first meeting was held. These artists were present: Sam. Colman, William Hart, Alfred Fredericks, Wm. Craig, Gilbert Burling, Ed. Hooper, Constant Mayer and A. L. Rawson.

At the second meeting, on January 2d, 1867, R. Swain Gifford, J. C. Nicoll, Harry Fenn, F. F. Durand, J. F. Cropsey and H. Sarony joined in the new movement; and on the 20th of the following December, the first exhibition was held, in conjunction with the Fall and Winter Exhibition of the National Academy of Design. The second exhibition opened the 21st of January, 1869, with 232 works in water color. The third exhibition opened January 21st, 1870, with 193 works, of which more than half were by members. The fourth exhibition, of January 25th, 1871, held 172 works,



F. W. FREER.

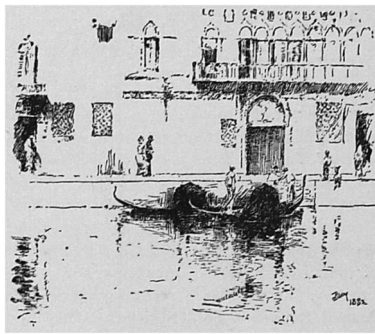


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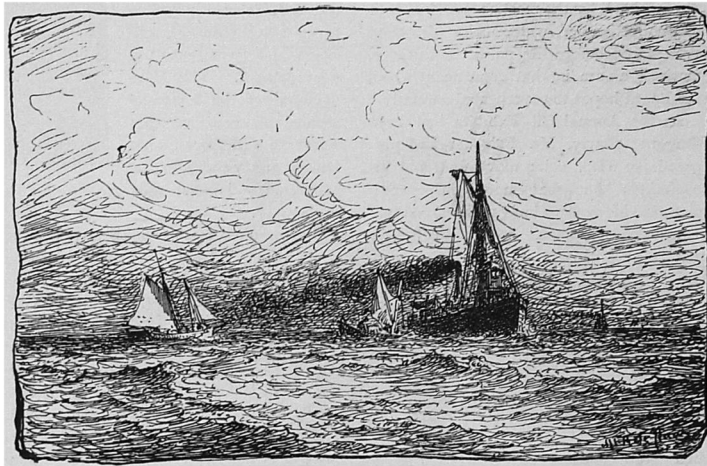
did success. The largest sales were made that had ever been known in the Academy. The close of the exhibition found the fund in the treasury twice as large as it was before, and the seventh exhibition opened on January 29th, 1874, with great *clat*. Nearly 600 works were received, of which 490 were hung, 353 water colors and 137 in black and white, 126 works being by members. The sales were quite large. The eighth exhibition opened in February, 1875, and was particularly fortunate in sales, which amounted to over \$15,000. The ninth exhibition, in February, 1876, was still more profitable, \$17,000 worth of pictures being sold.

The exhibitions now commenced to be more independent in character. Formerly it had been the custom to borrow foreign water colors, and to allow the dealers to place some of their stock on the walls for sale. The increasing quantity and improved quality of the works now offered caused the Society to hang mostly American works, and to hang in the most liberal manner the best of every school, from the stiff pre-Raphaelite to the wildest freak of impressionism. It had become a custom of *Harpers' Weekly* to publish a few cuts of the choice pictures of the exhibition; and during the exhibition of 1877 the treasurer, on his own responsibility, had an illustrated catalogue published, using Harpers' cuts. This was the first illustrated catalogue of the Water Color Society, and it sold so well that the next year the Society issued one at the outset of the exhibition, and has done so ever since, gradually improving as the artists became more familiar with the method of making drawings for "process work." As the exhibitions became popular and profitable, the dealers in foreign works became jealous, especially when the Society grew independent of them. The first effect of this jealousy was manifested in the shape of exhibitions and auction sales of foreign water colors, simultaneously with the opening of the Society's exhibitions. Then, a portion of the press was influenced to abuse the American Water Color Exhibition. The latter opposition finally died out as the native work improved and its merits forced recognition from the most reluctant. Competent judges agree that we have made more progress in our water color art, and show a much better exhibition than they do in England. So the exhibitions have improved until they are pronounced the best in the world.

The sales in 1880, were \$20,954; in 1881, \$28,068, and in 1882, \$26,085. The Society was very poor in its earlier days, and its members had to pay pretty well for the privilege of belonging to it. For instance, in 1867, to pay



ROBERT BLUM.



M. F. H. DE HAAS.



THOMAS HOVENDEN.

for postage, stationery, etc., an assessment was levied on the members present at the June meeting, and an additional sum of three dollars, to meet expenses during the time intervening before the next regular meeting. This placed a fund in the hands of the treasurer of thirty-three dollars! At the November meeting of the same year each member was assessed twelve dollars, dues for the current year. In 1869 a motion was made to abolish or reduce the dues, but it was urged to keep them up to form a fund for an independent exhibition—and the first independent exhibition found the Society in possession of only enough money to hire the Academy. To-day the Society is in a very independent position in regard to money. The members no longer pay dues or assessments, but new members pay an entrance fee of twenty-five dollars.

There are three stated meetings of the Society in the year, viz.: in January, March and November. At the March meeting, the officers for the year are elected. They consist of a president, a treasurer, a secretary, and a board of control, consisting of four members. These meetings are largely attended, and quite interesting. They are quite a contrast to the old days, when they were held in the studios of some of the members, and from seven to ten members was considered a large meeting. The Society now numbers about 100 members, resident and non-resident, and its harmony is rarely disturbed. There are a few laymen who became

members in the early days of the Society, and one of them became chairman of the Hanging Committee in 1882, and by his arbitrary conduct in hanging and rejecting pictures, caused a great deal of ill feeling inside as well as outside of the Society. This gentleman, in his pique at the result of his autocratic administration of his chairmanship, endeavored to start a rival water color society, a project which he soon abandoned, for want of encouragement.

The last exhibition of the Society was held during a severe spell of weather, and during a financial stagnation that boded no good. Still it was successful; and the next exhibition, which opens on the 1st of February, 1886, it is to be hoped will outlive all of its predecessors in quality of work and in sales; for without sales there is no encouragement for Art or any other industry. The early exhibitions only occupied one or two rooms; and to-day the whole Academy is filled, and numerous works are sent home simply for want of room. A beautiful feature of these exhibitions is the manner in which the rooms are decorated.

There was, about twelve years ago, a newspaper war about "body color" *vs.* transparent color; but as the Art critics made so many



HENRY FARRER.

very laughable mistakes, showing that they did not, apparently, know the difference between the two, the war has died out; and to-day an artist is allowed to paint his subject in any method that suits him—all means which do justice to a subject being considered legitimate. What the future of this Society will be no one can say; but with a large membership comprising many of the leading artists of the day, with a full treasury, an *esprit de corps* and a liberality rarely found in Art societies, it will take some time to fossilize, notwithstanding the charge that has been made against it that it has already suffered that mournful change. The standard of its exhibitions has certainly been well sustained; and, thanks to its quality and influence, its private views rank next to those of the Academy alone in interest and importance. Indeed, it has done no little to make the private view an enjoyable event. Thanks to it these occasions, instead of being social crushes, where one can neither see or be seen, have become the pleasant gatherings of the Art season; and by making the Academy a salesroom, they have given a chance for American pictures to be bought, under circumstances which might never occur in any other manner.

The name of the Society, it may be of interest to note, was formerly "The American Society of Painters in Water Colors." This has been simplified into the "American Water Color Society." The Society has no motto; it needs none.

FRANCIS A. SILVA.

The Art Amateur, for September, is strong in original sketches with the pen, whose authorship includes James Symington, D. R. Knight, George H. Boughton, Leon Moran and F. A. Bridgman, among others. The special technical articles fully sustain their interest. Montague Marks, publisher.

THEIR FIRST COMMISSION.

WHEN Black & White came to New York together from Philadelphia, where they had been brother students, and had worked side by side supplying pictures for the auctioneer—who in those days was the one supporter and patron of American Art—their capital, united with true fraternal trust in one purse, which each was to carry a day in turn, amounted to about \$100. Their entire belongings accompanied them in a single trunk, with two easels and two sketch boxes strapped to it, which they carried between them from the ferry to a cheap hotel in Canal Street. Thus accoutred, they embarked on life in what was a new world to them—two brave and talented young fellows, with all their future before them, and all their capital available at the shortest notice. They spent their first day staring at everything; their first night at a theatre and half a dozen beer gardens, and next day they began to look about them for a studio. They found them in plenty; but none whose cost conformed to the limitations of their means. On the morning of their third day they came upon the following announcement in the advertising columns of one of the papers: "Important to artists.—Dr. Jobson, being about to leave New York for six months, desires a responsible tenant for his offices and operating

rooms. No rent required, but care of place during absence. Especially adapted for studios." They found Dr. Jobson at the address indicated in the advertisement. The doctor was a professional embalmer, and occupied a top floor in a Broadway building pretty well uptown. The place had originally been a photographer's gallery, and possessed a magnificent skylight. It possessed also a couple of side rooms, which the sworn foe to the destroying worms had used as office and residence re-



WINSLOW HOMER.



C. MELVILLE DEWEY.